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"THE LITTLE OLD LADY BY THE  
SIDE OF THE MILL"

Broadcast No. 22 in a series  
of discussions of soil con-  
servation in the Ohio Valley.

WLW, Cincinnati

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U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
SOIL CONSERVATION SERVICE  
Dayton, Ohio



SOUND: Thunder, followed by rain...

ANNOUNCER

Fortunes Washed Away!

ORGAN: I GET THE BLUES WHEN IT RAINS.

ANNOUNCER

William Penn had hardly received his Royal Charter when the Mennonites and the Scotch-Irish penetrated the wilderness of southeastern "Pennsland" and settled in what is now Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. Thick forests of hickory, walnut, and sugar maple stretched in an endless procession across the blue horizon. But clearings soon appeared where the colonists chopped and burned the trees away--for here was rich soil--soil needed to produce food for a new nation. From Lancaster County came Robert Fulton, inventor of the steamboat. And on the soil of Lancaster County, "garden spot of the world," arose a flourishing system of agriculture. This is the story of a little old lady who lives by the side of a mill...

ORGAN: LITTLE OLD LADY.

ANNOUNCER

In 1868, little Mary King played near the waters of Octoraro Creek, which supplied power for her father's grist-mill...

SOUND: Water turning overshot wheel...

SOUND: Team of horses and wagon drive up...

SMITH

Hello, Mary. You seem to like to play down here.

MARY

Hello, Mr. Smith. Yes, I do like it.

SMITH

And what's nice about it?



MARY

I like to watch you men bring in your corn.

SMITH

Like to watch us bring in the corn, do you? How do you like this load?

MARY

Sure is big.

SMITH

That's because this is good land. And rich? Well, look at this load of corn, and there's a lot more.

MARY

That's what father says. He says that you are growing so much corn that he's kept busy all the time grinding it.

SMITH

Now that shouldn't make him mad. But he can't be too busy. I heard him say he was going to build a sawmill, too.

MARY

I think Uncle Robert will run that. Father says that most of the farmers are going to cut off a lot more trees to grow more corn.

ORGAN: LITTLE OLD LADY.

SOUND: Church bells.

KING

Good morning, Simon.

SMITH

And good morning to you, James. A fine Sunday, isn't it?

KING

Fine indeed. How are the young ones?





SMITH

Very well. They are over visiting their cousins on the Conestoga today. And how are Mary and Loretta and the other children?

KING

Fine themselves. But they can't enjoy playing down by the mill these days and listening to you farmers boast about your good crops and your good soil. You should hear them complain since the dam went out.

SMITH

I heard about the dam washing out last week after that heavy rain. But it won't be much trouble to repair, will it?

KING

Not much. It goes out every so often, you know. But lately I've noticed a lot of soil piling up behind it. That soil is coming from farms like yours, Simon.

SMITH

I know. But we have so much good soil I don't think it matters if a little washes away. Still....

SOUND: Occasional conversation in background, wagons and horses, and church bells much louder.

KING

Yes?

SMITH

James, many of us have almost forgotten the way our forebears handled their land. You know how they built masonry terraces by hand along the Rhine, and how they plowed their fields across the slope instead of up and down the hillsides.

KING

Yes, they worked hard to hold their soil.



SMITH

I've heard Neal tell about his grandfather--how he gathered black shale to spread over the soil on his hillside vineyards to protect the soil. But that soil in the old country was thin. This Lancaster soil is deep and mellow.

KING

Even so, it can wear out. We are good farmers, all of us, and we take pride in handing down good farms to our sons--but we'll have to guard against soil washing. Oh, well, here we are. Go in, Simon, while I gather the young ones up.

ORGAN: PRAISE GOD FROM WHOM ALL BLESSINGS FLOW.

ANNOUNCER

Every man should hand down to his son a better farm than he received from his father. This was the keynote of farming philosophy that brought forth prosperous fields and well-kept houses. It earned for Lancaster County a reputation as agriculture's garden spot. It was hard for the sombrely-clad Plain People to believe that the soil was washing away from their fields into the creeks and the rivers. But in 1934, heavy rains washed out old King's Dam again....

SOUND: Office door opens and closes.

NORMAN

Hello, Melvin. What's on your mind?

MELVIN

Plenty, Norman. Ed and I were out mapping that drainage along the West Branch of the Octararo, and we came across that old mill dam at King's Bridge.



NORMAN

Yes, I heard it went out.

MELVIN

And there's a darned good reason. We found an 11-foot deposit of silt back of the dam--piled up to the very brink of the old spill-way. We checked into it, and the soil men figure the deposits contain around 27,000 tons of soil.

NORMAN (whistles)

27,000 tons! And that doesn't take into account the soil washed over the dam or carried through the mill-race. I wonder how much soil has gone down that creek.

MELVIN

Plenty. That west branch drains about 1,200 acres, and most of it is cultivated. Say, Norman--let's go out and talk to Mary King. She's lived up there more than 80 years.

ORGAN: LITTLE OLD LADY.

SOUND: Occasional chirping of birds thru following sequence.

SOUND: Two men walking on gravel path.

MELVIN (Fading in)

...and here's another interesting point, Norman: we examined the layer of silt there, and found that the richest soil lay at the bottom, while that towards the top was poorer and more sandy.

NORMAN

So now even the rains can't find quite so rich a soil to wash as they used to.

MELVIN

This is the place. We can go through this gate.





SOUND: Wire gate opens and closes.

NORMAN

Is that Miss King up there on the porch?

MELVIN

I think so. I haven't met her myself.

SOUND: Dog barking.

MELVIN (talking to dog.)

Hello, boy. What's the matter, huh?

SOUND: Dog whines gently.

MELVIN AND NORMAN

How do you do? Miss King?

MARY

Good evening. Yes, I'm Mary King.

MELVIN

My name's Melvin Espy, Miss King, and this is Mr. Garber.

NORMAN

How do you do.

MARY

Come up and sit down.

MELVIN AND NORMAN

Thank you.

MELVIN

We're from the Soil Conservation Service, Miss King.

MARY

Oh, yes.

MELVIN

We were down looking at the dam by your father's old mill. I understand that it used to wash out every now and then.





MARY

Yes, it broke down every so often. Then we would repair it, and in one or two years the channel would fill up with silt again.

NORMAN

Miss King, you know where that soil comes from, don't you?

MARY

Oh, yes. I've lived here a long time, you know. I remember the old days when the farmers used to drive their Conestoga wagons to the mill, and they were always piled high with grain.

NORMAN

But now?

MARY

Oh, they still grow lots of corn, but they've having a time.

NORMAN

Their soil is washing away.

MELVIN

That's it.

MARY

I always liked to watch the old mill wheel, but I couldn't help feeling sad sometimes, because it was driven by the same water that was robbing the farmers of the very soil that grew their grain. I've lived long enough to see that even the best land-- yes, even agriculture's garden spot--can wash away.

ORGAN: LITTLE OLD LADY.



ANNOUNCER

Much water has flowed over many dams since the day King's Mill was built. Many streams have carried heavier burdens of silt than the Octoraro--chuckling and boasting as they rushed over other old mill wheels with their loads of priceless topsoil, stolen from countless thousands of farms throughout the land. And serious-thinking farmers, who scratch their heads as they stand on eroding land and wonder why crops are not quite so good as they once were, can learn the story from this little gray-haired old lady who has lived beside the Octoraro for a long, long time.

ORGAN: LITTLE OLD LADY.

ANNOUNCER

And now, here is Ewing Jones, your weekly spokesman from the Soil Conservation Service, at Dayton, Ohio.

JONES

Thank you, \_\_\_\_\_. I really think that we have a valuable lesson in soil conservation in the story of Miss Mary B. King, and I imagine that the old mill wheel could tell quite a story itself.

ANNOUNCER

Yes, indeed. Anyone who has lived in one place for more than 80 years is sure to see a lot of changes take place.

JONES

And here's another interesting fact. Today Miss Mary King, 82 years old, is seated in her home overlooking the Octoraro Creek, and listening in on this broadcast. We want her to know that we appreciate her story. And now, \_\_\_\_\_, let's not end the story there.



ANNOUNCER

Certainly not. I'm sure the story has a happy ending.

JONES

It has. Here is Charles B. Maits, of the Soil Conservation Service in Upper Darby, Pennsylvania. Charley is well acquainted with farming operations in Lancaster County, and I'm going to ask him to provide the happy ending.

MAITS

Before we get to that, Ewing, I'd like to mention one more point about soil erosion in Lancaster County. A trucker is now hauling stones and gravel deposited by the creek directly across from the King homestead.

JONES

So soil erosion, even in Lancaster County, eventually works the land down to the underlying rocks.

MAITS

It certainly will if sloping lands aren't handled carefully. But Lancaster County farmers are good farmers. They didn't realize just what was happening to their land, but they know now, and they're taking to erosion control in a big way.

JONES

I know that the erosion control methods used in Pennsylvania are, by and large, just about the same as those used in the Ohio Valley, Charley. Their work is based on the principle of making running water walk.

MAITS

That's the general idea, Ewing. They're starting at the top of the hill where the farm woods often grow. Cattle are being kept out of the woods by fencing. You know well enough yourself that cows and woodlands don't mix so well.





JONES

Right, Charley. The livestock chew young trees and what they don't chew they trample. By keeping livestock out, and by keeping the trees protected from fire, that should take care of any possible erosion in the woodlands. But how about the pastures?

MAITS

Lancaster County has thousands of acres of pasture, where cows turn clover and grass into milk for the Lancaster and Philadelphia markets. Farmers are improving their pastures through rotational grazing, liming and fertilizing, mowing, and such measures, but it's on the sloping cultivated fields where rain has caused the most damage.

JONES

Then strip cropping ought to come into the picture along about this point.

MAITS

But definitely. You know, Ewing, looking at a strip-cropped field from the road leaves me with the impression that the field has been altered to fit the hill as snugly as a well-tailored coat fits a man's shoulders. I guess Lancaster County farmers must feel the same way because they're using a lot of strip cropping. Terraces are also used on sloping, cultivated lands.

JONES

And how about gully control?

MAITS

Well, gullies are being controlled by simple log and stone dams, and by planting trees. Diversion ditches are being used, too.





JONES

Well, Charley, the proof of the pudding is in the eating. Are these soil conservation practices spreading outside of the demonstration area?

MAITS

They certainly are. Farmers like Donald Patterson, W. A. Fuller, and Howard and Paul Reath, whose farms are part of the King's Dam drainage area, are cooperators with the project who have adopted soil-saving measures, just to give you the names of a few within the Lancaster County area. Other farmers have seen the work, they've heard these men talk about how the soil is being held, and they're adopting similar measures on their own accord. It's that progressive attitude on the part of our farmers that has made Lancaster County famous as agriculture's garden spot of the world.

JONES

You should be proud of that attitude, and thanks for your comments, Charles B. Maits of Upper Darby, Pennsylvania. Now, \_\_\_\_\_, I wonder if you'd be so kind as to help me a moment.

ANNOUNCER

I'll be glad to, Ewing. Just what can I do?

JONES

Here is a bulletin, "What is Soil Erosion?"

ANNOUNCER

Now, you're not asking me what soil erosion is. You know more about the subject than I do.

JONES

No, \_\_\_\_\_. The name of the bulletin is, "What is Soil Erosion?" See for yourself.



ANNOUNCER

You're right. Quite a large bulletin, too.

JONES

About 84 pages, I believe. And you'll notice that it has lots of pictures. It shows the different types of erosion over the country, and what causes them.

ANNOUNCER

Then this bulletin is for distribution to anyone interested?

JONES

Yes, we'll send a copy to anyone writing to Soil Conservation, Dayton, Ohio, and asking for the bulletin on erosion. I think that vocational agriculture teachers, in particular, would like to have it. And that reminds me, \_\_\_\_\_, next week we're going to have a special program for vo-ag teachers.

ANNOUNCER

Copies of the bulletin, "What is Soil Erosion," may be secured by writing to Soil Conservation, Dayton, Ohio. Next week, vocational agriculture...

SOUND: Thunder, followed by rain...

ANNOUNCER

Fortunes Washed Away is an educational presentation of the Nation's Station.

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